

# AA In the Funnies

**AA** has always existed within the context of the culture in which it finds itself. Just as today's AA incorporates the Internet, texting, and a variety of popular media, in the 1940s Americans turned to the comics - the "funny pages" - for their ongoing entertainment.

In 1948 the popular strip "Wash Tubbs" (Later known as "Captain Easy") introduced a new generation to the use of AA in the ongoing struggle with alcoholism.

The strip carried the story of a lost man trying to reunite with his daughter from a brief marriage in England during the war.

## Les Turner's "Wash Tubbs" Redeems A Drunkard

By Ernest Lynn  
NEA Staff Correspondent  
CLEVELAND—On the comic pages of The Evening Citizen and some 600 other daily newspapers in the United States and Canada this month, a seemingly hopeless drunkard named Gig Wilty finally won his long fight to redeem himself, a fight that ended in his rehabilitation as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This was the wind-up of one of the most unusual continuities in comic strip history. A brainchild of "Wash Tubbs" artist Leslie Turner, the Gig Wilty story prompted unprecedented letters of praise all the way from Waterville, Me., to San Diego, Calif.

Gig Wilty was no old-timer on the comic pages. He came to life in the "Wash Tubbs" sequence that began last January, and as his plight as a skidding drunkard began to unfold in The Evening Citizen and other papers, there was some apprehension among editors. For 25 years, the cartoon has been a top favorite among the comics issued by NEA Service, and while "Captain Easy" has overshadowed the title character in recent years, it has been mostly a comedy-adventure strip.

But the letters that began to roll in from readers soon dispelled any doubt over the place of such a story on pages normally reserved for high adventure, mystery and gags.

From Portland, Ore., a member of A.A. wrote: "I know of at least five hopeless alcoholics you have saved through your comic strip in the Oregon Journal."

From New York, the Alcoholic Foundation reported numerous inquiries about the sequence as it appeared in the World-Telegram, and added: "We feel that it is far-reaching in its effects and has great possibilities."

An A.A. member in Canton, O., wrote: "Gig Wilty may go way beyond your original design for him as a comic strip character. His name may become synonymous with Alcoholics Anonymous and his experience may influence hundreds, if not thousands, of alcoholically sick people to take



THE CRISIS—While his motherless daughter Cathy prays and his protector, Captain Easy, sleeps, Gig Wilty faces the problem that haunts most newly-reformed alcoholics.

heed and heart and inspire them to seek their physical, mental, social and moral rehabilitation. You rightly deserve an Oscar for producing the most interesting and educational comic strip in the newspapers today."

A minister in Butte, Mont., wrote Turner that "I am going to pray right along that God will use your pictures to help a lot of men who need restored courage and a new lease on life."

The only woman member of A.A. in a small Oklahoma town ended her letter of praise to Turner with the question: "Are you, too, a member?"

Cartoonist Turner is no A.A. himself, although he has met a number of people around his home in Orlando, Fla., who are. Last winter, as he listened to some of their frank stories, he sensed the makings of a good story to tell in his own medium. Before he roughed in a single panel, however, he did one of the thorough research jobs that stamps all his continuities—no matter how much comedy they contain—with authenticity.

A Texan by birth, 50-year-old Leslie Turner began drawing in high school. He started making money with his talent in his freshman year at Southern Methodist University. He wanted to be a cartoonist, but before he achieved

that aim he had become a successful illustrator working for some of the top magazines in the nation. Then, in 1937, Turner joined NEA, working on the production of "Wash Tubbs," gradually taking over more and more of the work until, today, he does it all.

When he was through researching, no A.A. had anything but praise for the story. Many a member recognized such true episodes as the one about the member who thought he'd try just one drink in a glass of milk, then wound up back on skid row.

The response to the story of the drunkard's reform prompted many papers to editorial comment, such as this from the Bismarck, N. D., Tribune:

"It is one of the odd things of human nature that a story seriously told is often not widely read. Through the medium of 'Wash Tubbs,' a so-called 'comic strip,' the truth about alcoholism is being told to more people than would ever learn it through more serious mediums. . . . Thus a simple little comic strip, something we usually think of as a light means of useless entertainment, serves a missionary's purpose. By the time the story of Gig Wilty has been told completely, lots of righteous people may look about themselves and see real-life men

and women who could use a little of the friendly help Gig Wilty is getting to whip a curse!

In Denison, Tex., the A.A. chapter's letter to Turner prompted a front-page story in the Denison Herald. The Gig Wilty story, they said, "has done more to create a sympathetic understanding of the alcoholic's problem than volumes of printed words could achieve. While the value of your contribution to this problem is indeed great to your adult readers, its far-reaching effect and influence on the minds and characters of your young readers is certainly truly inestimable. We truly believe that you have done much to offset the recent criticism directed at 'comic strips' in general and a wonderful service to potential alcoholics in particular."

And in Greenville, Miss., the Delta Democrat-Times put its thoughts this way in an editorial: "... Comic strips can render an invaluable service to the public when their creators are so inclined. Don't lump all comic strips together. When comics are indicted as an evil influence, keep 'Wash Tubbs' in mind. He's doing what few real people can do. He's spreading the word about problem drinkers in the place where it will do the most good: To our children."

The editorial is reprinted from the Ottawa Evening Citizen, published Wednesday May 25, 1949

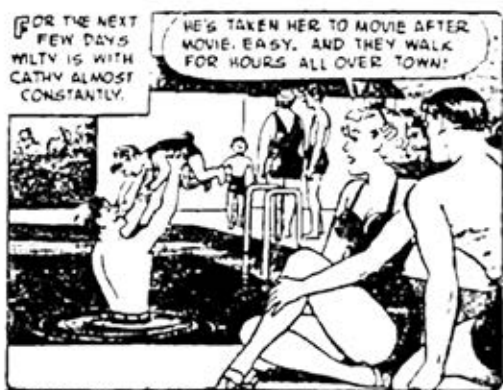
### THE BACKSTORY -

During WWII Captain Easy helped bring a little girl from England to find her father. Later the father is found working in an oil field and deep into Alcoholism. Captain Easy knows some people who can help him back to being who he should be...

The reproductions of the strips referred to in this editorial on the following pages were taken from micro-fiche copies of the original newspaper pages were and cleaned up in Photoshop. These are not the quality preferred, but were the best available at press time.

JKA  
Raleigh, NC













## WASH TUBBS



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Captain Easy wasn't the only paper advocate of AA. You can find link sto more drug and alcohol related comics at this website:

<http://www.ep.tc/aa-comics/>